



Can Communists Kill

**China and Korea Present Contrasting Pictures
of Reaction to Red Pressure;**

North African History Reveals Churches Can Perish

Can the Communists wipe out the church behind the curtain? In less than my own lifetime they have swept across more than one-fifth of the surface of the globe and shut off from freedom one-third of the world's population. Can they brainwash Christian faith from those they have conquered as completely as they have stolen from them their freedom? Can they destroy the church as easily as they have blotted out all other institutions that have stood against them?

Some people say the question should not be asked. From two different directions come objections to this kind of a query. On the one hand, some say, "Why all this talk about wiping out the church? If the church behaves itself the Communists won't bother it." Others, equally impatient but for very different reasons, say, "The question indicates lack of faith. Jesus promised his Church that the gates of Hell should not prevail against it."

But the question cannot be quite so simply evaded. In answer to the first objection, it must be stated flatly and dogmatically that whatever the immediate party line may be, whether it be soft or hard toward the Christian church at any given moment, Communist doctrine leaves no doubt that ultimately the church is to be destroyed.

It is true that in the early days of the revolution, Communists naively expected that religion would wither away as the social oppressions on which religion fed were lifted. The church, therefore, need not be attacked; it could be

left to die. But as Christian faith stubbornly refused to wither away the Communists were forced to seek to hasten its death by persecution. The Militant Atheists of the First Five Year Plan were told point-blank that their task was "to rid the country of the poison of religion."

Once the attack is mounted, not even "good behavior" can win immunity for the church behind the curtain. It may bring a temporary amnesty, but the basic conflict between Christianity and Communism is irreconcilable. At a meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Peking, a Russian speaker was answering the questions of eager young Chinese enthusiasts. One of them asked, "If the church is so superstitious and reactionary, why do you still allow it to exist in Russia?" The speaker paused. "This is a very difficult problem," he said, then continued ominously, "It may take many years, but give us time."

If the Soviets are given time, who can say that the little churches of Communist Asia will be able to withstand the juggernaut?

"But the gates of Hell shall not prevail against them," the earnest Christian cries. That is not quite true. The promise is to the Church, not the churches. The Biblical promise, like Noah's rainbow, is no guarantee of local immunity. There have been many floods, though no world deluge, since Noah's day, and many churches have been wiped out since our Lord made his promise to his Church. If it has happened before, it can happen again. The Christian church is retreating today before the greatest onslaught it has suffered in 1300 years, since Moslem warriors swept out of their desert fastnesses and slashed away and destroyed one half of the Christian church of that time. They virtually obliterated the great church of North Africa. What the Moslems did to Africa, cannot the Communists do to Asia?

The question is raised most insistently in regard to China. There is much talk today of the "debacle of the Christian mission in China." Once there were some 8000 Protestant missionaries in that land. Today there are perhaps eight left, and that handful is all either in jail or under house arrest. Defections from the Christian church to the Communist cause have been commonplace.

For example, a girl who had been an earnest "inquirer" for several years and who had intended to be baptized at

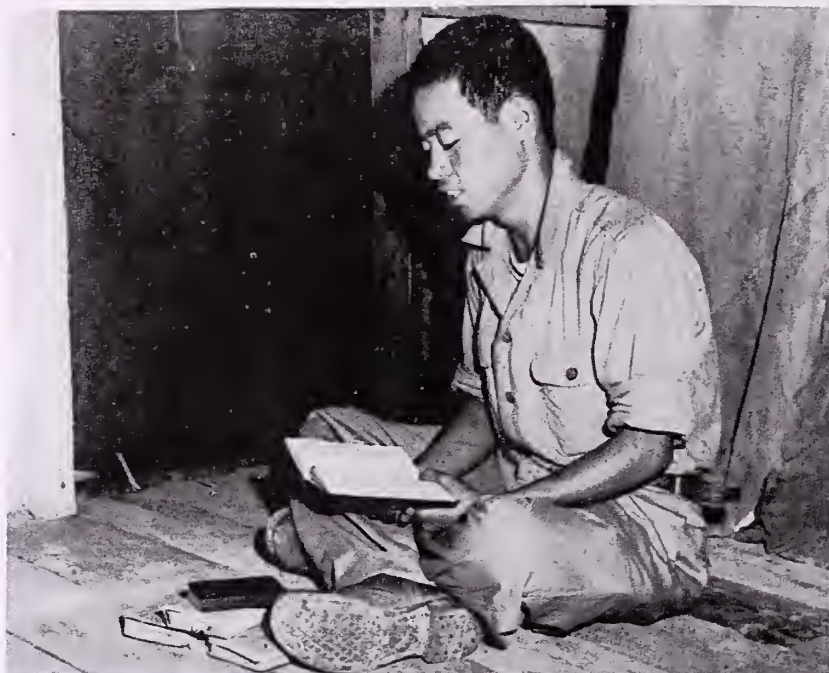


In the striking cover picture by Robert Doares, ETERNITY's illustrator, the aged Korean typifies the sturdy resistance of the believers of his nation to persecution by the Communists.

the Church?

By **SAMUEL H. MOFFETT**

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Easter made a trip to Tientsin not long after the Communist conquest and was so impressed by the morale and discipline of the Red army that she said, "Formerly I believed that man can only change from evil to good with the power of Christ. But Christians only talk. They do not act. Now the Communists have really acted. It is not just one or two of them; the liberation soldiers that I saw in my Tientsin home are *all* very nice. Isn't their doctrine, then, more powerful than Christianity?"

For those who could not be won over so easily, the Communists had another approach, intimidation. This did not take the form of a direct frontal assault on the church, however. Communists had learned a lesson in Russia. "Religion," they discovered, "is like a nail. The harder you hit it, the deeper it goes into the wood." In China, therefore, the party line called for an oblique attack. Freedom of religion was guaranteed in the constitution. Christianity was given representation on the People's Political Consultative Council. Churches were allowed to remain open.

But from two directions, the party closed in on the church. One line of attack, called a reform movement, was designed to purge the church from within of all elements hostile to the state. The goal was to transform the church into a docile, controlled creature of the state. The other line of attack was directed against such elements in the church as refused to be controlled, against faithful Christians who could acknowledge no other absolute than Jesus Christ as Lord. Even here, however, lip-service was paid to freedom of religion. The assault was indirect. Church workers would be jailed not as Christians, but as criminals. False accusations of immorality, or corruption or subversion would suddenly be hurled against them. Arrest was swift, and condemnation never in doubt. Even when the Communists moved against the foreign missionaries they followed the same indirect pattern. When they finally decided to force me out of China the charge against me was not that I was a missionary, for that was still legal; they charged me rather with embezzlement. Communists are clever. They want no Christian martyrs.

Only time will tell how successful their strategy will be. The church still stands, of course. From a church tower in Shanghai a great lighted cross shines out over the city every

night. Churches are full, in many cases. The cutting off of foreign funds and the resulting necessity of self-support has usually been a blessing, not a curse.

But Communist strategy is a long-range strategy. They do not expect to wipe the church out of existence overnight, and current reports of continuing Christian activity behind the curtain should lead to no premature optimism. Always the grim parallel of North Africa suggests itself. There too, some Christian communities survived for centuries. But walled in, isolated and cut off from all fruitful contact with other Christians and all opportunities for evangelistic outreach, they slowly withered away.

And yet, the prospect for Christian survival under Communist conquest may be not quite so hopeless as this gloomy parallel might lead us to believe.

Upon North Korea, too, the Communist curtain has fallen, and there we have not only a somewhat longer perspective for judgment as to the effectiveness of Communism's anti-Christian crusade, but also considerable proof of the almost incredible resiliency and vitality of the Christian faith in persecution.

Communists have had since 1945 to carry out their campaign against the North Korean church, which is predominantly Presbyterian. As in Russia and China, the campaign began with moderation. The church was asked simply for its cooperation with the new regime. In fact, when Premier Kim Il Sung was first brought into Korea by the Russians in December, 1945, he blandly announced, "We will have no Communism here. Organize any parties you like." To quiet the fears of the Christians, he took as one of his top advisers a prominent Korean pastor, to whom, he claimed, he was distantly related.

But in Korea, far more swiftly than in China, Communist strategy shifted from an indirect, long-range program to a direct, brutal, frontal assault on the Christian church. The first direct clash occurred as early as March 1, 1946, in the Communist capital, Pyongyang, which had once been the largest mission station in the world, and was still the center of the church of North Korea. Patriotic Christians have for many years celebrated March 1, the Korean independence day, with church services. The government, however, ordered all to attend a Communist-led political rally and

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COMMUNISTS VS. THE CHURCH

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forbade private gatherings. When the Christians refused to call off their religious celebrations, pleading freedom of worship, and gathered for a mass meeting in the Central Presbyterian Church, Communist police broke in with drawn bayonets, arrested the pastor and began to carry him off to headquarters. They reckoned, however, without the courage and resourcefulness of the Pyongyang Christians. As the policemen threw the pastor into a jeep and leaped in themselves to race away, they found themselves hemmed in by a great mass of protesting Christians. They could not move. More protesting multitudes began to arrive. "Release the pastor, or you will never leave," they were told. Humiliated and angry, they finally released him.

The unexpected vigor of the Korean church frightened the Communists into precipitate persecution of the Christian population. For a while, participation in the Soviet-sponsored "Christian League" was enough to secure for church workers some freedom of activity. Only those who declined to join were brought under pressure and forced out of churches and seminaries. But all too soon even those who cooperated in the "Christian League" found themselves no longer safe from sudden imprisonment or execution as the regime moved to wipe out the entire effective leadership of the Christian church. In 1950, in Pyongyang more than one hundred church officers were liquidated in less than a month. It is estimated that more than one-third of Korea's 900 Presbyterian ministers have been murdered or are missing.

The case of Pastor Kim Hi Sun, as reported by a missionary, is typical, except for one thing. He escaped. Like many others, he was arrested for failure to join the "Christian League" and sentenced to six years of hard labor. His son was forced out of the seminary and hid for three months in a hole dug under their little home. Pastor Kim was shipped north as a slave laborer in a gold mine, where guards drove a thousand prisoners to work twenty hours a day. An average of three prisoners died under the inhuman treatment every day. After the Inchon landings, as UN forces advanced north, the prisoners were herded still farther north. The rumor spread that they were all to be executed. About two o'clock one morning Pastor Kim, taking advantage of the sleepiness of a guard, slipped out of the long death column and escaped. Four days of walking brought him home at last to Pyongyang just in time to join the populace in welcoming the liberating UN troops.

Then for five short weeks before the curtain fell once more, as Pastor Kim, reunited with his missionary associates,

ministered to the thousands of Korean Christians who poured out of homes and caves and hills to worship God again in freedom, he stood as a symbol, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ that not all the concentrated hate and power of the police state could subdue.

North Korea is once more behind the curtain. What will now be left of the church? A pastor who escaped since the truce reports that only one church is left standing in Pyongyang, the city of churches, and that one is organized under the banner of the communized "Christian League." Can any other church survive?

I am inclined to think it can. It may be unorganized, but it will be alive, even in prison camps or holes dug in the ground. For this stubborn fact remains: every time the curtain breaks, we find the church still there.

Some time ago, before the truce, I heard a man describe the arrival of refugees fleeing from their persecutors in the North. Bear in mind that perhaps a full half of the North Korean population has fled from the Communist regime and sought safety in the South. The number is estimated at between four and six million out of a former North Korean population of nine million.

They make their precarious way, these refugees, shivering in the Korean cold, past bristling Communist lines, moving in single file over the mine fields of no-man's-land, sometimes cut down by mistake as enemy raiders within sight of safety. Everything they own, of course, is left behind. What few things they can bring with them they carry in little bundles tied up in bits of cloth.

And when, at last, they reach safety, what is the first thing they do? "As they filed into freedom," the observer said, "those refugees would squat in little circles on the ground. They would open up their bundles, and there on top of each bundle was a black book, the Bible. And then, right there in that little circle, those homeless refugees would proceed to organize themselves into a church!"

This is the church the Communists cannot destroy. For a while they can force it out of organized existence; they can destroy most of its membership; they can drive it out of sight. But whenever the curtain lifts that church arises alive and unconquerable into sight once more. And wherever the curtain, like some great dam, breaks for a moment, there pour forth into freedom like rivers flowing into the sea, little groups of Christians whose first concern after the hidden years is to organize themselves once more back into the visible Church of our Triumphant Lord.

And we know that for that Church, the promise still stands, "The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

END

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